

9. Resurrection and the Future of Israel: Rom 11:15

‘In Romans 11 Paul employs a variety of metaphors in an effort to explain how it is that Israel could be largely missing out on the purpose of God while the Gentiles are more fully participating in it’ (p. 181). And this, though Kirk would, and has been, arguing otherwise, is one of the points of Romans.

While Kirk sees, and continues to argue, the resurrection as the core of Paul’s purpose in Romans, he has here hit upon an even more core issue for the letter. Paul is concerned with showing the Romans that Jews have not been cast aside in favor of Gentile Christians. Resurrection is, naturally, a part of that: but a part and not the whole which unlocks the meaning of Romans. Or, in other words, resurrection is just one aspect of Paul’s purpose (and Kirk is right in this) but it is not the only one.

‘Just as God (the Father) brought resurrection life to Jesus, so too will he bring resurrection life to Israel. The resurrection of Jesus is giving Paul a lens through which to view Israel’s present story: it is a death, but just because it is a death occurring within a cosmic drama that turns on the death and resurrection of Christ, Israel’s death itself is a subplot that must turn from death to life’ (p. 185), opines Kirk. And now the ghost of Universalism appears in the shadows. Kirk’s implication seems clear: Jesus came to life again and so will Israel- as the focus and locus of God’s salvific work. So, on the one hand, we have a Paul (in Kirk’s interpretation) who is a bit of a supersessionist (as seen earlier in this review), and on the other a Paul who sees Israel as remaining the center of God’s redemptive plan even after the Christ event and the ultimate victims of God’s overarching plan (in spite of any wish on their part to the contrary). And maybe Kirk is right. Maybe Paul is both supersessionist and universalist. But I doubt it.

There is more hinting in this direction when Kirk concludes this chapter suggesting ‘God’s acceptance of his people will bring them back from the dead’ (p. 192).

10. Resurrection and the Lord of the Church: Rom 13:8-14 and 14:1-9

‘The tensions Paul addresses in Romans 14 fit within the broader scope of Jew-Gentile relations that give the letter so much of its particular slant’ (p. 200), says Kirk. Quite right! It fascinates me that Kirk is able to see this quite clearly and yet find a way to subsume it to resurrection. ‘The God of Israel has raised Jesus from the dead, Paul claims, and this installation into the role of Son of God...’ (p. 205) brings us back again to something else we’ve seen earlier in this volume: adoptionism.

To summarize- in chapters 9 and 10 Kirk continues to offer support for his thesis while at the same time overlooking the obvious: that resurrection may be ‘a key’ but it cannot be considered ‘the key’ to unlocking Romans. The ‘key’ is really a whole ‘key-chain’ which contains a number of elements including but not limited to resurrection, justification and how it is to be obtained (and the Reformers were right on this and wrong to ignore the other ‘keys’), Israel and God’s continued purpose for it, etc.

Can Kirk 'bring it home' in the final chapter and once and for all, convince his audience that the resurrection of Jesus is the lens through which we must look in order to comprehend what Paul's purpose is in this letter? We shall see.

11. Reading With the Apostle

In this chapter, which is more theology than exegesis, Kirk draws together the threads he has spun and – in my opinion – does his finest work in the discussion of *Apocalyptic Suspense*. I won't spoil it for you because to summarize would be to cheapen. Do, though, read this part with special care as it will reward you with important insights. Still, I have to say that when Kirk writes 'Present-resurrection with Christ must be held in paradoxical tension with the world-inverting texture of apocalyptic' (p. 213) he is 100% correct. And when he continues a few lines later '... the future for God's people not only impinges on their present of its own accord, but that we are called to bring that future to bear on the present' (p. 213) he is, again, 100% on the mark. The book is worth the price of this section alone.

Not so engaging is Kirk's discussion of the issue of theodicy. 'Romans functions as a defense of the faithfulness of the God of Israel to the promises contained in Scripture' (p. 216). No, it doesn't, because the issue of 'theodicy' is a modern concern. Paul didn't question the 'why God allows evil' question which we post-Enlightenment folk enjoy so much and over which so much ink has been spilt. Romans no more serves to 'justify' God than Genesis does.

[There seems to be something of an error on page 220, 6 lines from the top, where this incomprehensible sentence is found: 'Might such service be directed toward a neighbor love which would deliver others from injustice as much as this lies in our power?' I read that sentence a dozen times and never could make heads or tails of it. And there's another on page 231 where, 2/3rds down the page Kirk cites p. 288 when in fact he means p. 228. The book doesn't have 288 pages including indices].

And, finally, Kirk, like so many, mistakenly reads the Reformers through the lens of Luther alone. He writes '... the letters to Galatia and Rome have become the cudgels with which the church has been fractured in the name of right doctrine. This is the deep irony springing up from the well of the Protestant Reformation' (p. 231). This may indeed have been true of Luther's followers- those wily second generation Lutherans who were so intent on making Luther into someone he was not. But it is decidedly untrue of Zwingli and Calvin and Bullinger and Bucer and even Simons. Indeed, if Kirk wants to discover cudgel bearers he would do better to look at the Catholic Counter-Reformation, the Grand Inquisition, and the various Papal Bulls enforcing conformity by the edge of the sword. Why does Kirk represent the Reformation (Luther) so poorly? Because it is Luther that he must, when all is said and done, overcome. It is Luther and the Reformation's reading of Romans which sees the core of the book in the question of justification. That is the insurmountable hurdle for Kirk. That is the final barrier to Kirk's reading of the resurrection as core. To persuade readers of his view, he must first dethrone the other.

And he may have. If, and only if, we remember that Kirk's reading focuses too narrowly and fails to take into account that Luther too was right. And so is Kirk. And so are those who see the core of Romans as the inclusion of Gentiles into Israel. Because, when all is said and done, Romans isn't unlocked with one key.